

USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Burns District
HC 74-12533 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

**DECISION RECORD
and
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)
for
WILLAMETTE VALLEY SOARING CLUB SPECIAL
RECREATION PERMIT, OR020-RP-01-04

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
OR-026-01-30**

INTRODUCTION:

The Willamette Valley Soaring Club has applied for a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) to hold its annual gathering on the Alvord Playa. This event has occurred in the past without a permit. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) policy allows for SRPs to be issued for organized group activities in areas where permits are needed for management or resource concerns. There is little data on the amount of use the Alvord Playa receives from both individuals and organized groups. SRPs are one way to gather this information for the current Andrews Resource Area/Steens Mountain planning effort.

The Alvord Playa is used for a variety of recreation uses, including motorcycle and ATV riding, driving, land sailing, glider flying, and camping. Holiday weekends during the summer are periods of greatest use. The playa, a dry lake bed, is accessible during the summer and fall months. Water pools on the playa during the winter and spring, making travel dangerous or impossible and erasing most traces of recreational use.

The Alvord Playa is located in the Alvord Desert Wilderness Study Area (WSA). The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 mandated the BLM to manage its land under wilderness review "so as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness." The BLM Manual Handbook H-8550-1 - Interim Management Policy (IMP) for Lands Under Wilderness Review (Release 8-67, 7/5/95) provides specific guidance on the management of resources and the evaluation of actions within WSAs.

The Andrews Management Framework Plan (MFP) allows "The Alvord Playa would be managed for all legitimate public land uses as well as ORV (sic) use. Recreation vehicles and commercial uses which do not impair the wilderness values of the Alvord (sic) WSA would be allowed until Congress makes its final determination on wilderness."

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION:

The Proposed Action is to issue the Willamette Valley Soaring Club a Special Recreation Permit for camping and flying gliders on the Alvord Playa. Permit issuance would provide for resource protection. The decision to be made is whether to permit the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative is to deny the Willamette Valley Soaring Club permit application. The proposed club activities would not be permitted and would not be allowed on the Alvord Playa.

DECISION:

As a result of the environmental analysis presented in the Environmental Assessment (EA), it is my decision to approved the Proposed Action. The rationale for the FONSI support this decision. The Proposed Action, coupled with the mitigation measures detailed in the EA and FONSI, has led to my decision that all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm and to protect wilderness values have been adopted. Selection of the No Action alternative would not provide for resource protection or allow for recreation use data collection. This decision is consistent with the Andrews MFP (1982).

All resources have been evaluated for cumulative impacts. It has been determined that cumulative impacts would be negligible for all resources.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts detailed in the attached EA, I have determined that approval of this proposal, when coupled with the mitigation measures presented and detailed in the EA, will not have a significant impact on the human environment and preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required. I have also determined that the proposed activity meets the “nonimpairment criteria” for lands under wilderness review.

Rationale:

The activities described in the Proposed Action, will, as best can be determined, prevent unnecessary and undue degradation of public land. Resources analyzed in the EA include air quality; cultural resources; noxious weeds; Threatened, Endangered, and special species/migratory birds; wilderness; and recreation. Impacts to these resources are considered nonsignificant (based on the definition in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

Air Quality: Increases in air-borne dust would occur during the towing of gliders. These increases would be small and short-term and would not be greater than the wind-caused dust storms.

Cultural Resources: Cultural resources could be affected if the camp sites are located on or

near cultural sites. Disturbances could include digging of fire pits or toilet pits and/or collection of artifacts by club members. As described in the attached EA, archaeological surveys will be conducted at the proposed campsites in order to avoid these impacts.

Noxious Weeds: The potential for spread of noxious weeds is always present, but soil and water conditions on the Alvord Playa inhibit vegetation growth.

Threatened, Endangered, and Special Species/Migratory Birds: The snowy plover does not nest at or near Camp Site 1. Soaring Club activities at Camp Site 2 could disrupt snowy plover nesting sites. As described in the attached EA, camping and soaring activities will not be allowed in the snowy plover nesting area east of Alvord Hot Springs.

Wilderness: There would be short-term impacts to naturalness, solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation in one part of the Alvord Playa, but these values would still be available in other areas of the playa and the remainder of the WSA. As describe in the attached EA, impacts to naturalness would be reduced through the portable toilet requirement.

Recreation: Primitive and unconfined recreation associated with the WSA could be temporarily affected. Dispersed recreation users would generally not be affected. The glider activities may attract additional sightseers and campers.

Mitigation Measures/Monitoring: Approval of this proposal is subject to the following mitigation measures which will be included as stipulations attached to the SRP.

Cultural Resources: A cultural resources inventory would be conducted at the proposed campsites. Should cultural resources be located, the area around them would be flagged and use would be prohibited. Collection of cultural resources, including points, flakes, and ground stone, would also be prohibited.

Threatened, Endangered, and Special Status Species/Migratory Birds: Camping and glider activities will not be allowed in the area east of Alvord Hot Springs. Specifically, Sections 33 and 34, T.34 S., R. 4 E., and Sections 3 and 4, T. 36 S., R. 34 E., would be closed to all activities. Recommended camping areas on the west side of the playa are northeast of Frog Springs in Section 9, T. 35 S., R. 34 E. and along the playa edge south of Frog Springs.

Wilderness: The digging of pit toilets will not be allowed. Those members of the Willamette Valley Soaring Club not staying in RVs with sanitation systems are required to carry and use portable toilets. All human wastes will be disposed of in an approved sanitary waste disposal facility.

Monitoring: Standard BLM monitoring of the SRP during the event will be conducted.

These decisions may be appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals, Office of the Secretary, in accordance with the regulations contained in 43 CFR, Part 4 and the enclosed Form 1842-1. If an

appeal is taken, your notice of appeal must be filed in this office (at the above address) within 30 days from receipt of this decision. The appellant has the burden of showing that the decision appealed from is in error.

If you wish to file a petition pursuant to regulation 43 CFR 4.21 (58 FR 4939, January 19, 1993) or 43 CFR 2804.1 for a stay of the effectiveness of this decision during the time that your appeal is being reviewed by the Board, the petition for a stay must accompany your notice of appeal. A petition for a stay is required to show sufficient justification based on the standards listed below. Copies of the notice of appeal and petition for a stay must also be submitted to each party named in this decision and to the Interior Board of Land Appeals and to the appropriate office of the Solicitor (see 43 CFR 4.413) at the same time the original documents are filed with this office. If you request a stay, you have the burden of proof to demonstrate that a stay should be granted.

Standards for Obtaining a Stay

Except as otherwise provided by law or other pertinent regulation, a petition for a stay of a decision pending appeal shall show sufficient justification based on the following standards:

- (1) The relative harm to the parties if the stay is granted or denied,
- (2) The likelihood of the appellant's success of the merits,
- (3) The likelihood of immediate and irreparable harm if the stay is not granted, and
- (4) Whether the public interest favors granting the stay.

Signature on file

July 6, 2001

Miles R. Brown

Date

Andrews Resource Area Field Manager